

In the face of significant challenges, Lukas Gudinskas, a young political officer in Kandahar, is providing critical reporting to better inform our policies here in Canada. The results will inspire a better future for the people of Afghanistan.

Making a Difference in Kandahar

Our Kandahar-based colleagues have some of the most unusual and dangerous assignments in the Canadian foreign service. All live and work in Afghanistan on an “unaccompanied” basis, meaning they are not permitted to bring their spouses or other family members with them due to the inherent dangers. Kandahar is considered a “level-five” hardship posting, signifying the most difficult type of assignment.

Tell us about yourself.

I am 26 years old, born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario. I am an FS1 and I previously worked in Ottawa in the Peacekeeping and Operations Division (IRP). I am currently a member of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT), which is based out of Camp Nathan Smith, located directly in Kandahar City. KPRT comprises 335 people from a variety of departments, including DND (who form the bulk of the personnel), DFAIT, CIDA and the RCMP. KPRT works closely with key regional leaders and communities on reconstruction and development, and promotes the rule of law and good governance. Our team helps the Government of Afghanistan expand its presence and effectiveness in the province.

How would you describe your surroundings?

Many get confused and think that KPRT is at the Kandahar Airfield (KAF). Better known by the public, KAF is located beyond the Kandahar city limits and a full convoy is required when travelling there from KPRT. KAF is the main southern base for the NATO International Security Assistance Force. The Canadian Battle Group HQ is based at KAF, as are sections of the multinational force operating in Regional Command South (RC(S)). KAF is best described as a small town. There are stores, restaurants, a bus line and, most importantly, a Tim Hortons. It is the hub of activity and the central node for all military operations in the south.



Lukas Gudinskas (third from left) is working on a series of reports that will offer a greater and highly welcome understanding of each district in the province of Kandahar. **From left to right:** Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence; LCol Bob Chamberlain (commanding officer of the KPRT); Lukas Gudinskas and his DFAIT colleague, Farrah Musani.

“Working with such great people ensures that even when someone is feeling down or getting tired of the fast pace of work, there are others looking out for him or her.”

What are your main responsibilities?

My primary job is political reporting. I meet with local leaders, communicate details of important developments in the province, and get involved with project development. My colleagues and I prepare reports and coordinate monitoring by our locally engaged staff. I am also working on a series of reports that will provide us with a greater understanding of each district in the province.

What is your typical work day like?

The one thing you learn very quickly is that there is no typical work day in Afghanistan.

If I’m staying at the camp, I head to the office, which is located about 20 metres from my room (very short commute). A day at the office can include completing reports, drafting project proposals or attending meetings. Often there are unexpected meetings with guests who arrive on base.

If I’m going to a “shura,” or meeting with local leaders, then my day is significantly

different. Any movement off the base is coordinated with the military and a protective guide patrol is organised. A patrol generally consists of three armoured vehicles and approximately 20 soldiers. Travelling in a Light Armoured Vehicle feels like being transported in a box with no windows. You see the base as you leave and arrive at a completely different site, having seen nothing en route. The trip can be long, bumpy and exhausting.

How many hours do you typically put in each day?

Depends on the day, but on average about 10–11 hours. Most days I arrive in the office between 8:30–9 a.m. and work until about 8:30 p.m. Friday is the one day off for Afghans; on that day, we try to sleep in a little, so we only work about 4–6 hours. While travelling with patrols allows us to get out and meet Afghan interlocutors, it also extends our day because we still need to prepare reports and catch up on work that has piled up during the day.